



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

DAVID HUME'S NATURAL HISTORY OF RELIGION.

THE great historical interest attaching to *Natural History of Religion** is due to its being the origin of the modern science of religion. Considering the non-existence of any previous work and the material at disposal—very limited compared to that at hand nowadays—one cannot help admiring Hume's lucidity and precision in laying down those questions of principle still treated by the present science of religion. Not the less amazing is his development of religion in its main features. It has taken more than a century before this development has met with imitations perhaps equal to Hume's old work, a fact which imparts to it a value far beyond the historical one.

The philosophy of religion is generally divided in three parts: the metaphysical, criticising the theoretical validity

* Hume's *Natural History of Religion*, which was written about 1751 and published 1757, is printed in Green and Grose's Standard edition of Hume's works and in the old editions of his essays, which are now only to be had at secondhand. The need of a cheap edition of Hume's essays has given rise to a most objectionable undertaking, Ward, Lock & Bowden (afterwards Routledge & Sons) having brought out an edition, the anonymous publisher of which omits sentences of vital importance—no doubt on account of a certain bigoted tendency. The result is a corruption of Hume's opinion of so audacious a nature as to be almost unequalled in modern times. In order to counteract this abominable falsification and to give Hume's ingenious work a wider circulation than its present one, Mr. John W. Robertson has arranged a separate edition at a price of one shilling. This edition, perfectly correct, with an excellent preface (A. and H. Bradlaugh Bonner) makes the public in England and all the world over indebted to him. Wishing to draw attention to this meritorious little edition I shall also endeavor to show the significance of Hume's work, a significance which only of late has been fully conceived. In this way I want to give a clue which will make the apprehension easier; without such a clue it is often somewhat difficult to catch the principal ideas of the work, partly veiled by additions commanded by time and circumstances.

of religious notions; the ethical, treating the value of religion in behalf of the individual and the race; and the psychological historical, examining the origin and development of religious conceptions.

It is this last, the proper science of religion, of which Hume has laid the foundation in the present work. But a criticism of the religious notions must precede an examination depending on the fundamental idea that the religious notions are only to be explained through psychology and history. The work of Hume's which originated the modern science of religion as its principal point of view implies a spiritual development in the history of human thought. By another work *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (written in 1751, but not published till 1779, three years after Hume's death) Hume finished the critical examination, returning the last question of science in reply to the question of the theoretical validity of religious notions. Besides being the founder of the proper science of religion, Hume became the accomplisher of the critical philosophy of religion, the latter quality determining the former. In the history of religious problems he is the great focus concentrating all the rays, his contribution in this domain proving him a pioneer still more than his examinations concerning metaphysics and ethics—examinations which are far more appreciated.

The great development in the history of English intellectual science which Hume's thoughts rested upon and brought to an end, is generally comprised under the name of English deism. The criticism of the popular notion of God, hidden under the new name "deism," originated in Greece like most other pioneering thoughts. Xenophanes, the founder of the Eleatic school, was the first known person entitled to the name of deist. He was the originator as Hume was the accomplisher. He started the inquiry into religion in a purely psychological way. The deism of

recent time refers to antiquity. The rupture with the inherited range of ideas indicated by deism in the philosophy of the Renaissance, originated in the thoughts of Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics. The first pioneers are Cusanus (*De pace seu concordia fidei*, 1453), Ficinus (*De religione christiana*, 1474), Montaigne (*Essays*, 1580), and especially Bodin, who in 1593 wrote the *Colloquium heptaplo-meres*, a religious philosophical work which, however, became of no great consequence, as it appeared only in a few manuscript copies circulating exclusively in the literary world. Even if Bodin is the actual founder of deism, it was the English philosophy that had to prepare the way from a historical point of view. The English deism was initiated by Herbert of Cherbury (1581-1648) as the doctrine of "natural religion." It was then generally believed that one could refer to a "law of nature," certain unchangeable principles forming the immovable basis of any judicial system. In like manner Herbert of Cherbury was of the opinion that all religions rest on five axioms, which in their pure state form the historical basis of the later, misrepresented popular religions. This quintessence of religion tends to prove the existence of a God best worshiped by piety, and the fact of a future life, administering reward and wrath, and in a mere psychological way Herbert of Cherbury founded the five fundamental dogmas on natural instinct (*De veritate*, 1624, *De religione gentilium*, 1645). By his arguments for the existence of God, Descartes (1596-1650) tried to give the "natural religion" a rational basis (*Meditationes*, 1641). The same aim appears in Locke (1632-1704), who by definite examples wanted to fasten the "natural religion" trying at the same time to bring it in closer connection with the dogmas of Christianity (*Reasonableness of Christianity*, 1695). This tendency transforms "natural religion" into Locke's rationalism, continued by Clarke (1675-1729),

Wollaston (1659-1724), and Toland (1670-1722) in his first work (*Christianity not Mysteriorious*, 1696). The close connection which Locke wished to establish between natural and revealed religion, was again loosened by the genuine deists in the 18th century. The protagonists are Toland (chiefly by *Pantheisticon*, 1720), Shaftesbury (1671-1713), Collins (1676-1729), Tindal (1656-1733), Chubb (1679-1742), Bolingbroke (1662-1751), and Morgan (?-1743). All of them decidedly maintained that the moral principle, being independent of the positive religions, is the true basis of any religion, assertions which made them confine true religion in a very few doctrines, i. e., natural religion was again severed from Christianity, opposing it in a more conscious way than before. Generally the arguments for natural religion were adhered to, and in some places the need of a historical view of religion was manifest. This tendency appears with Morgan, but most obviously with Conyers Middleton (1683-1750) in his *Letter from Rome* (1729), but Hume and Gibbon (1737-97) were the first authors who made it more than mere attempts.

In *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* Hume criticises the prevailing arguments for the existence of God, first answering the cosmological and ontological ones. The main attack is turned against the argument from the adequacy of the world, in refuting which Hume gets an opportunity to give an ingenious anticipation of Darwin's theory (Parts V and VIII). The work is formed as a dialogue between three persons, an orthodox, only serving the others as a pawn on the chess-board, a representative of English deism, and finally Philo, a skeptic whose argumentation occupies the greater part of the work. Hume's preference for presenting his critical philosophy of religion in the form of a dialogue is certainly to be understood as a measure of precaution. At that time people ran a risk in speak-

ing their mind plainly. Hume did not even venture to publish the Dialogues himself, but he attached much importance to its being published after his death. His friends, Adam Smith, the famous political economist and philosopher, and Wm. Strahan, his publisher, did not venture to undertake the publication. Hume had foreseen this circumstance, and in his last will he appointed the younger David Hume, his nephew, to publish the Dialogue in case of its not appearing within two years and a half after his death.

In this Dialogue Hume gives his own conception of life; though he makes some reservations, it is a fact beyond dispute that Philo, and only he, represents Hume's own opinions. These are practically far behind the English deism and may be summed up in the following words. It is no good advancing arguments for any religious doctrine, not even for the general dogmas of "natural religion." In contemplating life with all its contrasts we are not even justified in assuming as reasonable the theory of a benevolent and mighty Being. The true conclusion for human beings is the belief in a world, carrying on its operations, indifferent to all our notions of good and evil. The world itself is neither good nor evil. "It were therefore wise in us to limit all our inquiries to the present world, without looking farther. No satisfaction can ever be attained by these speculations which so far exceed the narrow bounds of human understanding" (Part IV and XI)*. A further penetration into the treatise will make it evident that Hume's real aim was against deism, natural religion founded upon certain theoretical or moral arguments. Deism had made revealed religion irrational. Hume pointed out that religion is irrational, even in its abstractest and most rational form, the belief of the deist in theoretical or ethical rationality. The words finishing *Natural History*

* *Vide* Green & Grose, II, p. 409.

of Religion run parallel with those sentences of Philo, imparting the innermost recesses of Hume's philosophy of life. His position is that of pure positivism, which does not leave even religious and moral questions as ultimate questions, a positivism doing away with those questions which are excluded from any rational solution, not acting in this way to end in a barren skepticism but in the work of secular life, the most fertile and most positive of all. Our path through life becomes less frightful when we perceive that gods and hells are only dreams and chimeras. The persons undertaking the mere secular work with the greater vigor are those who consider it their only object of life, whose limit is the limit of all things. In his works Hume imparts to us his wisdom of life which probably is to become life's final wisdom. He speaks with plainness and simplicity, disdaining the vague symbols and quaint words which so often have slurred and will slur the simple gospel of life. Hume's ending in this rigorous, positive conception of life was not due to indolence; on the contrary, he went to the bottom of the question. In his view it was man's duty to surrender everything to humanity.

No doubt the reader will wonder why Hume constantly treats of the true and genuine theism, founded on incontestable, rational arguments, especially on those tending to prove the adequacy of nature. But all this is *vox et prae-terea nihil*. Hume has considered it convenient to take refuge in the abstract deism. In each chapter he makes it an official bow, maintaining the old superiority which characterized his occasional bows to Christianity and to the Established Church. One has to remember that Hume himself was the publisher of this work, and Hume was a cautious man disdaining religion and metaphysics too much to entertain any wish of being further inconvenienced by these things which were utterly indifferent to him. In a famous letter to his friend Edmonstoune Hume determines

what character a young clergyman is to assume. The young man is a sort of disciple of Hume's, having acquired notions not very consistent with his priestly character, i. e., he does not believe in all of the Thirty-nine Articles. In Hume's opinion he is to accept of the living with an easy mind. Unfortunately he himself had spoken his mind too plainly to be a hypocrite in this particular, but he advises every one not to turn martyr in favor of some quite indifferent opinions, concerning questions unknown to every one, but in silence to worship the gods in conformity with the custom of the empire. "Did ever one make it a point of honor to speak truth to children or madmen?" (Burton, *Life and Correspondence of David Hume*, 1846, II, 188). Hume has been reproached for paying compliments to Christianity, a practice taking example from the antecedent philosophers though contrary to Hume's persuasion. To call this proceeding hypocrisy would be rather a strong assertion. In the first place these sentences are so cold and formal that one cannot possibly attach too much importance to them. In the second place Hume did not wish to make himself a martyr for the sake of Christianity. Hume never became a martyr; his very positivism must needs consider it a mere stupidity to aim at a martyrdom which could not benefit anybody. Those having a mission in life are the very persons to comply with regard to details in order to conquer when opposed to questions of vital importance. They make a contrast to the little ones first seeking the kingdom of God. Hume sacrificed the formalities in order to maintain the realities. Though he started with a ceremonious bow he preferred to stand as a free and independent man—rather than run the risk of being brought down or crushed by a religion whose freedom in heaven relied on the most brutal instruments of power ever employed here on earth. To do in Rome as the Romans do, is a good moral principle; if the State demands

it one is to sacrifice to the image of Cæsar ; i. e., only, if in doing so one acts for the general good, without believing that a trifle of frankincense might bar the road to heaven. Hume's contemporaries did not mistake his opinions, a fact shown for one thing in the statement of his funeral. It was thought necessary that his grave should be watched by two men for eight nights, to prevent it from being violated by the mob.

Hume has smilingly told an untruth in every chapter of the work here before us, he has made the official bow to children and madmen, fully aware that this reverence would make even more intelligent people consider him a deist—an opinion which was justified. On the other hand he was no doubt perfectly sure that intelligent people later on would understand his true mind, conceiving that the two works practically making the strongest attack on any religion, in regard to English deism, may be understood as the continual refrain of Marc Antony's dreadful speech of accusation,

“For Brutus is an honorable man.”

English natural religion, rationalism, or deism was sufficiently honest ; so honest as to make even Hume use it as a screen in his dealing with children and madmen ; otherwise he knew perfectly well that his stand and that of the deist differed infinitely more from each other than did deism from positive religions. Hume's protest against the name of atheist (*vide* Burton, II, 220) was due to his dislike of all that sort of indications. In his opinion the affirmation of the nonexistence of God was as dogmatical as the sure belief in his being. We know nothing and cannot possibly know anything concerning the world, its origin or ruin, of the continuation or passing away of its values. Nor ought we to occupy ourselves with that sort of ideas which only tend to distract the work from temporal society, cause strife and anxiety, suffer essential and

unessential questions to make distinctions where no distinctions ought to be,—this was Hume's conception, which he maintained against the positive popular religions, nay even against the natural religion behind the honesty of which he sought shelter.

In this connection I had better premise an explanation of a definite head in Hume's terminology. On almost every page he uses the word theism, which he opposes to polytheism, used of any religion having several gods or demi-gods. Polytheism identifies all systems of idolatry, national religion, paganism and superstition. It is more difficult to explain the meaning of "theism," used by Hume in two significations. Generally it denotes monotheism (used in section IX), a term however including "genuine theism." Only in one passage he uses the word deism (*vide* section XII, where he speaks of "avoiding the imputation of deism and profaneness") but this "genuine theism" is indeed the very natural religion laid down by the English deists, starting with Herbert of Cherbury, ending with Hume, a fact plainly shown by Hume's own definitions (sections VI, and XIV). According to this definition the popular monotheism and the "genuine theism" (i. e., deism), both included in the appellation of theism, differ as to their principles. The former asserts a "particular providence," i. e., the deity may be induced by prayer to encroach upon the natural causes, breaking his own laws. The latter admits of "an original Providence," i. e., the deity governs the world according to general, settled laws, the course of which is free and undisturbed. In this connection I shall call attention to the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748, section XI, "Of a Particular Providence and of a Future State") and further to a letter to Mure, in which Hume decidedly maintains that "the prayer is very dangerous, and leads directly, and even unavoidably, to impiety and blasphemy"

(Burton, I, 162-164). Considering Hume's individual view of religion and the caution he showed when he mentioned it before the public, it will easily be understood that it was his very wish to leave the term theism in vagueness. With the word theism on his lips he could make his official bow both to the right and left flanks of Christianity. To the right even able to attack it in driving at Catholicism, paying a special reverence to the Church of England. To the left, bowing to the "sublime doctrines," which the English deism considered the heart of all religion, both from a theoretical and—chiefly—from an ethical point of view.

But there is another fact causing the vagueness of the term theism. Hume was practically unable to draw the line between theism and polytheism. His very superiority appears in his perceiving that the distinction between one god and several gods has no scientific signification. In the end the notions converge into one another. The theism professing "a particular Providence" is considered as belonging to the popular religions. After all Hume feels convinced that all religion as it really exists, is popular religion or superstition (*Dialogues*, Part XII; cf. Jodl, *Leben und Philosophie David Humes*, p. 194). The "genuine theism" does not really exist, unless in the mind of a few philosophers whose meditations are far from life's reality. There only remains a vague distinction between the higher and lower strata within religion, and Hume's ingeniousness manifests itself in his putting down the law for the principles of religion. He is the first to point out that the strata are fluctuating. The religious conceptions having obtained a certain height are either entirely undone or they are dragged downwards into the great living depths from which they rose. The everlasting communication with this depth is the condition of their carrying on their life. There is no limit between the higher and

lower religious strata, only a continual movement, an everlasting flux and reflux. According to the interpretation of the words theism and polytheism are to be defined as higher and lower strata within religion. Hume's concentrating all his inquiries into the relation of these strata is the cause of his penetrating more than any other into the innermost problem of religious science. The philosophers of quite recent days can hardly be said to have surpassed him.

Hobbes (1588-1679) laid down the first stone of the edifice of the modern science of religion by his indication of the "unknown causes," which are embodied and deified. The gods are created by our ignorance of real causes and by our fear of what is to befall us in time to come; their supernatural, incorporeal or immaterial characters "are of the same substance with that which appeareth in a dream to one that sleepeth or in a looking-glass to one that is awake" (*Leviathan*, 1651, Part XII). But Hume is the masterbuilder who completed the edifice in its main features. By his fundamental assertion that all forms of religion are to be explained in a psychological and historical way, he laid down the basis which is to be taken for granted in the examination of any religion, be it called a higher or a lower one. His way of putting the question concerning the development of religion indicated the course of all science of religion.

I dare say that Hume's little treatise is so far beyond all that has been written down to quite recent days that its ideas have entirely surpassed peoples' understanding. Generations to come will be astonished to see how all threads meet in Hume's stating of the problems. Having done with the psychology of individuals and of races, walking along vast and troublesome roads passing through the history of all religions, we shall arrive at the views, seen for the first time in their abstract, principal form by

Hume's bright eye. Then we shall certainly feel regret in realizing that at an earlier date we might have advanced even beyond our present position, if we had founded our exertions on Hume's working hypothesis and method of work instead of wasting an enormous amount of scientific energy in working with vain views and theories, descended from English deism to German romanticism, first faced by Feuerbach (1804-72), afterwards by the modern English school in the science of religion.

As already pointed out, the distinction between the higher and lower forms within religion is the fundamental view of the whole treatise. As this view furnishes the clue to the whole disposition, a little difficult to catch without a careful study, a short representation of the content—starting from this fundamental view—may be useful to the understanding.

The work is made up of two main divisions, the former is a historical investigation of the higher and lower strata within religion and their mutual relation (Section I-VIII), the latter is an estimation of this relation. Hume's historical way of putting the question turns this estimation into a comparison between paganism and Christianity (Sections IX-XV).

The different chapters are connected in the following way: The work is opened by a short psychological introduction. In the first chapter Hume maintains that the lower religious strata have been the original ones. It is easily understood that the adherents of "natural religion" came to the conclusion that the universal dogmas expressed in this religion were the principal ones also from a historical point of view. This idea was already entertained by Herbert of Cherbury, but it was more emphasized by his successors Browne (1605-81) and Blount (1654-93). "Natural" religion became the primitive religion of mankind, but experience having shown how far the positive

religions have diverged from their origin, the thought of a historical misrepresentation was obvious. The cause of this misrepresentation had to be looked for among the people profiting by everything in religion which was considered an unnecessary and obnoxious appendix to the pure natural religion, i. e., among the priests. The fact of this being so is the origin of two notorious historical theories: primitive monotheism and the explanation of religion given by priestcraft. In the history of philosophy the latter theory originated with Kritias, the tyrant and sophist. In his opinion the first lawgivers created the gods from reasons of subtlety. By a concise, careful argumentation Hume demonstrates the absurdity of the belief in primitive theism.

The second and third sections examine the origin of the lower forms. Having made a bow to theism so ingenious that it really becomes a bow to polytheism, Hume proceeds to show how primitive man's incoherent range of ideas must create a variegated confusion of gods, acting in an arbitrary way. Furthermore he shows that primitive man's creation of these beings is not due to intellectual motives, i. e., curiosity concerning the origin of the world; it is only caused by the practical desire to procure the daily necessities of life. But primitive man does not know the causes of happiness and unhappiness, "the unknown causes," which already Hobbes considered the obscure gaps in our knowing, where the gods could live, but from where they were displaced by the physical understanding. We conceive those "unknown causes" like ourselves (*Proso-popoeia*). The bringing forward of this analogy is the germ of the later English theory of animism and marks the continuation of Xenophanes's ingenious fragment, which is the origin of the European science of religion: "The mortals say that the gods were born like themselves, had apparel, voice and form in conformity with them.

But if the oxen, horses, and lions had hands and like men were able to form pictures, the horses would form the gods like horses, the oxen like oxen, all species of animals would form their gods exactly in their own likeness. The Ethiops imagine their gods black and flat-nosed, the Thracians conceive their gods with blue eyes and red hair." (Diels, *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, p. 54). Hume affirms his theory by pointing out that the increase of superstition is proportionate to the difficulty in indicating its real causes, a circumstance explaining the fact that people are oftener led into religious notions by fear than by hope.

Section IV is an interpolation; it shows that the deities were not originally considered the creators of the world and thus defines the contrast between the higher and lower strata. Section V again takes up the thread, giving the further development of the lower strata. As early as section III Hume began to discuss the notion of local and special deities. In this chapter he points out that the distribution of distinct provinces to the several deities must grant them some attributes, thereby giving rise to allegory; he draws attention to apotheosis, the fact that mankind is able to elevate superior men into gods, further showing that the public devotion may be further increased by art's representation of divinities. At last he gives a resumé of the five first chapters.

The three following sections treat the relation between the higher and lower strata. Section VI makes it evident that the higher strata originate from the lower ones. Hume mentions the agents connecting polytheism and theism. Those agents are (1) the worship afterwards called monolatry; (2) the conception of a "patron-deity"; (3) the existence of a social order among the gods, i. e., a further development leading the original analogy from the individual domain into the social one; (4) adulation towards the god whose assistance is invoked. Section VII

confirms the doctrine that theism is hardly ever found in a pure state among the popular religions. Hume asserts that even if religion tells you that the Deity is in possession of all sublime qualities, the assent of the vulgar is merely verbal: the old religious strata still exist as the essential part of religion. After all the "higher" notions are but empty words, epithets which people dare not refuse verbal assent, but whose life only consists in words. Hume plainly advances the idea quite recently expressed by I. G. Frazer in the following words:

"Brahmanism, Buddhism, Islam may come and go, but the belief in magic and demons remains unshaken through them all, and, if we may judge of the future from the past, is likely to survive the rise and fall of other historical religions. For the great faiths of the world, just in so far as they are the outcome of superior intelligence, of purer morality, of extraordinary fervor of aspiration after the ideal, fail to touch and move the common man. They make claims upon his intellect and his heart to which neither the one nor the other is capable of responding. The philosophy they teach is too abstract, the morality they inculcate too exalted for him. The keener minds embrace the new philosophy, the more generous spirits are fired by the new morality; and as the world is led by such men, their faith sooner or later becomes the professed faith of the multitude. Yet with the common herd, who compose the great bulk of every people, the new religion is accepted only in outward show, because it is impressed upon them by their natural leaders whom they cannot choose but follow. They yield a dull assent to it with their lips, but in their heart they never really abandon their old superstitions; in these they cherish a faith such as they cannot repose in the creed which they nominally profess; and to these, in the trials and emergencies of life, they have recourse as to infallible remedies, when the

promises of the higher faith have failed them, as indeed such promises are apt to do." (*The Golden Bough*, 2d edition, III, p. 49.)

Hume shapes his thought ingeniously in section VIII, dealing with the flux and reflux of the higher and lower religious strata. The fluctuation takes place according to the law which I have called "*lex Hume*." (*Archiv für Religionswissenschaft*, IX, 415.) According to this law there is within religion a tendency to elevate the deity as much as possible, but this abstraction disengages the comprehension from its native soil. Common people stick to their concrete religious ideas, a fact causing the movement of a lower stratum towards the surface, when the pressure has ceased which the deity—now abstract—exercised when a concrete notion. Hume calls this new emerging stratum "middle beings," and he is fully justified in asserting that this fluctuation in the religious strata takes place always and everywhere, not like a sudden eruption, but representing the very life and working of religion. Hume's thought is expressed in brief, distinct words; when entirely worked out it will certainly illustrate religion's obscurest, innermost nature more than any other point of view. After all the thought is an ingenious application of "the theory of abstract notions," put forward by Berkeley (1685-1753) in his *Principles of Human Knowledge* (1710), a theory which in the religious science has an extensive scope—in downright contradistinction to the abstractions of natural religion and all the bloodless children thus engendered in the history of philosophy. It may be that Hume had some foreboding of this scope, but he has hardly perceived it clearly, otherwise he would probably have scrutinized the law from an individual and social point of view, examining the very seats of the fluctuation. Thus he would have been called back to what he previously indicated: that religion itself is fixed and unchangeable, the

flux and reflux being due to interaction between the real religious strata and the other, higher ones, i. e., positive knowledge and worldly ethics. The former strata were insensible, though always moved by the agents arising from them, i. e., both theological and ethical systems.

The last chapters give an ethical estimation of the relation between the higher and lower strata. The vague notions of polytheism and theism are now historically defined, the lower strata being identified with all pagan religions, while the higher strata are nearly assimilated with the Jewish-Christian religions, partly with Islam. Hume concluded his historical account by indicating that the lower forms survive unaltered beneath the higher ones, since higher religious formations are properly speaking only abstractions and empty words. Here he shows that the lower strata really are the better ones, because the so-called higher ones in fact are nothing but the lower ones. Their superiority is but empty words, they have the same deficiencies as the so-called lower strata besides the additional one of pretending something more. In short: Hume wants to settle between paganism and Christianity. In section IX he emphasizes the toleration of idolatry as opposed to Christianity's persecutions and multitude of human sacrifices. Incidentally he states his theory of sacrifices. In section X he lays stress on the social virtues of paganism as distinct from Christianity's contempt of world and mankind. His words quite correspond to those of Schiller in *Die Götter Griechenlands*,

"Da die Götter menschlicher noch waren,
Waren Menschen göttlicher."

In section XI Hume shows that paganism is more sensible than Christianity, on account of its fundamental view of the gods and the fact that it consists in cults more than in theory, which made it less pretentious than the Christian theology. He maintains that in controversies between

Christian sects the reproach of heresy has always been stuck to the more sensible part. The ideas of section XII are somewhat difficult to catch. With a very polite bow to the Church of England, Hume derides the Christian (Catholic) rites—for instance the Lord's Supper—which in his opinion are as absurd as the ideas of paganism. He examines the relation between peoples' creed and their own conjecture about this creed, observing that human conscience includes the greatest contrasts: a concise, scientific range of ideas alongside of the most superstitious notions,—a profound psychological remark, which as to the individual consciousness forms the supplement to Hume's assignment of the lower strata which survive unaltered in the people. In agreement with the words of Lucretius Carus,

"Primus in orbe deos fecit timor,"

and with Hobbes's psychology of religion in *Leviathan*, Hume had emphasized fear as the strongest religious impulse. The gods are created by fear, and fear secondarily begets praise, elevating the gods. But in Hume's opinion this idealization—if it was not *idola fori*—according to its origin only indicated an enlargement of the power of deity. The gods had to remain on an ethical level with the men who created them in their own image. As set forth in section XII the consequence is that the fear of the god magnifies in proportion as he increases in power. This enlargement of the deity's power is contingent upon no other deities being acknowledged beside him. In each religion there are two poles represented on one hand by the kind, beneficent gods, on the other by the noxious, wicked ones. "The higher the deity is exalted in power the lower is he depressed from an ethical point of view." In the so-called higher religions the tension becomes strongest in the negative pole: a fact illustrated by means of Judaism and Christianity. Hume cautiously screens himself by

Andrew Michael Ramsay (1686-1743) the friend of Fénélon and author of *Philosophical Principles of Natural and Revealed Religion, Explained and Unfolded in a Geometrical Order* (1749). In section XIV Hume repeats that the ethical idealization of the deities is only a verbal definition. Religion will always contradict morality from the mere cause of its emphasizing other things than an honest life. Were we to suppose a purely moral religion, the only cult of which consisted in sermons of a virtuous conduct of life, the very attendance on these sermons would soon be turned into religion. Any religion is compatible with the greatest baseness, nay it rather produces it, for the fervor of religious passion arises from a range of ideas entirely different from man's sense of truth and goodness. In the last chapter Hume sums up the last six chapters, setting forth the contrast between the doctrine of the higher religious tenets and the life of their adherents. He concludes by maintaining that religions do not give any real answer in reply to the question of life and death, but that the history of religion in showing the mutual struggle of the different religious systems may also be of practical importance in enjoining us to be cautious in our relation to those questions. I believe Hume was right in this particular. What the more abstract criticism of deism failed to reach as to religion may surely be reached more easily by the path of historical investigation. But whether an adherent of Hume's conception of life or not, one is almost bound to grant that the contest between religious and non-religious conceptions approaches more and more the mere historical domain, a fact proved by the time succeeding Hume's—in spite of the recent American religious psychological humbug, in spite of all its desperate endeavors to make science founded on "mind-cure" and statistics of conversion. Be the expectations and the result as they may, only historical meditations and arguments give value to

attack and defence. But whatever stand we will take in the strife or what special domain within the science of religion we wish to peacefully explore, we ought always to return to the classical work of religious science and bow our heads in reverence to the great founder of this science.

ANTON THOMSEN.

UNIVERSITY OF COPENHAGEN.